

Guide to the Leonard Warren Papers, 1938-1963

JPB 06-75

Music Division

**The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts
New York, New York**

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Descriptive Summary

Title:	Leonard Warren Papers
Collection ID:	JPB 06-75
Creator:	Warren, Leonard
Extent:	8.92 linear feet (8 boxes)
Repository:	Music Division. The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Abstract: The Leonard Warren Papers document the professional career of the American baritone. Warren was a leading performer with the Metropolitan Opera for over twenty years, whose significant accomplishments have been overshadowed by his dramatic death onstage during a performance. Much of the collection is comprised of clippings and scrapbooks, as well as some promotional materials, such as broadsides and posters. It also contains numerous condolence cards, letters, and telegrams sent in the wake of the singer's untimely death.

Administrative Information

Access

Collection is open to the public. Library policy on photocopying will apply. Advance notice may be required.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

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Custodial History

The Leonard Warren Papers were donated to the Music Division in 1984 by Roy Leiffen.

Processing Information

The collection was processed and cataloged in June 2007.

Biographical Note

Although overshadowed by his dramatic death onstage during a performance, the career and accomplishments of American baritone, Leonard Warren (1911-1960) were significant. A leading performer with the Metropolitan Opera for over twenty years, Warren excelled in the Verdi repertory. As a member of the first generation of American-born opera singers to develop a truly international reputation, his success also helped to solidify their position within that prestigious company.

Born Leonard Warenoff, the son of Russian immigrants, in the Bronx, he enjoyed a typical middle-class Jewish upbringing of the time and later shortened his surname to Warren when he became a professional singer. Encouraged by an aunt, Leonard received his first formal voice lessons as a teenager at the Greenwich House Music School. Although his talent was apparent, his family remained unconvinced of the feasibility of a career in music. Following his graduation from Evander Childs High School, Warren briefly worked at his father's firm in the wholesale fur trade and took evening business classes at Columbia University.

After a few more years of haphazard musical study and odd jobs, however, Warren decided to pursue his goal of becoming a professional singer more seriously. Early opportunities included appearances on the WOR radio station in New York City and a 1934 summer engagement at a Catskills resort. In 1935, Warren auditioned successfully for the Radio City Music Hall Glee Club, joining future Metropolitan Opera colleagues, tenor Jan Peerce (already a featured soloist) and fellow baritone Robert Weede as a member of the chorus. It was during this period that Warren began to train with influential vocal coach, Sidney Deitch. In 1938, Warren became one of the finalists in the Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air competition, earning him prize money and an opportunity to formally audition for the company later that year.

Struck by the inherent quality of his voice, conductor Wilfred Pelletier took a personal interest in Warren's career development and helped to arrange for an additional stipend that would enable him to go to Italy for the summer to work on roles with teachers Giuseppe Pais and Riccardo Picozzi in preparation for a Metropolitan Opera debut in the fall of 1938. While staying in Milan, Warren struck up a friendship with two visiting New Yorkers, Agatha (or Agathe) Leiffen, a former voice student, and her brother Roy. Agatha would become Warren's wife a few years later, while her brother later served as Warren's legal advisor. Following his return to New York, Warren signed his first contract with the Metropolitan Opera Association on November 18, 1938. His initial appearance with the company was in a Sunday concert on November 27, 1938, in which he sang excerpts from *La Traviata* and *Pagliacci*. His formal debut in a complete opera, in the role of Paolo in *Simon Boccanegra*, came on January 13, 1939.

Still a somewhat raw talent, Warren's progress with the Metropolitan Opera was slow, but steady. Early on it was decided that the best course for him to pursue would be to focus on the Italian opera repertory. He became a Verdi specialist, most notably in the title role of *Rigoletto*. His performance was preserved in a 1950 landmark recording, the first complete opera released by RCA Victor. Warren enhanced his standing and broadened his experience through engagements in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico during the 1940s. He also toured extensively throughout North America in recitals and regular appearances with other opera companies, including the San Francisco Opera.

His career seemed to coalesce most fully during the 1950s after he signed with the Sol Hurok organization in 1952. In 1953, he appeared to great acclaim in Milan, Italy at La Scala, winning over the Italian critics and audiences alike for his strong performances in the Verdi staples, *Rigoletto* and *Otello*. The following year, Warren was intimately involved with the world premiere of Norman Dello Joio's cantata, *The Lamentation of Saul*. Another major accomplishment during this decade was Warren's 1958 tour of the Soviet Union, one of the first postwar appearances in that country by a prominent American performer.

Warren, who was steadfast in his preparation for his roles, developed a reputation for being difficult. His conversion to Catholicism also alienated some of his Jewish colleagues at the Metropolitan Opera. By the time the 1959-1960 opera season began, however, he was regarded as a fixture within the company and faced a demanding schedule. On March 4, 1960, while performing as Don Carlo in Verdi's *La Forza del Destino*, Warren collapsed onstage during the second act after completing the aria, "Urna fatale." Confusion ensued, the curtain was brought down, and Warren was pronounced dead backstage after attempts to administer oxygen and other forms of first aid failed; the apparent cause of his death was pronounced a cerebral hemorrhage. Declaring it, "one of the saddest nights in the history of the Metropolitan," general manager Rudolf Bing announced Warren's death to the stunned audience and suspended the rest of the performance.¹

Warren's death was treated as front page news in all of the New York papers. More than 3,000 people paid their respects at the Abbey funeral home, and the memorial service, held at the St. Vincent Ferrer Roman Catholic Church on March 7, 1960, was attended by over 1,000 mourners, including many of Warren's friends and associates. In 1986, the Leonard Warren Foundation was established by Barrett Crawford and Warren's sister, Vivien Warren, to promote the legacy of Leonard Warren and to provide support to young singers. In 2000, a Foundation-sponsored biography of the singer was published and a commemorative CD set of Warren's recordings was released.

¹"Leonard Warren Collapse and Dies on Stage at 'Met'," *New York Times* (Mar. 5 1960), 1, 20.

Scope and Content Note

The Leonard Warren Papers document the professional career of the American baritone. Much of the collection is comprised of clippings and scrapbooks, as well as some promotional materials, such as broadsides and posters. Subjects that are particularly well represented among these papers are Warren's various engagements in Latin America during the 1940s and his successful 1958 tour of the Soviet Union, arranged by the Hurok organization. The sudden and unexpected death of Warren in 1960 elicited an outpouring of condolences sent directly to his widow, Agatha Leiffen Warren, or forwarded to her by various departments of the Metropolitan Opera Association. Among the many condolence cards, letters, and telegrams contained in the collection are messages sent by Marion Anderson, Rudolf Bing, Agnes De Mille (whose husband, Walter Prude, represented Warren professionally), Jerome Hines, Erich Leinsdorf, Robert Merrill, Dimitri Mitropoulos, Richard Mohr, John D. Rockefeller, and Richard Tucker. Perhaps some of the most interesting items, however, were tributes offered by fans of the singer. Aside from a few candid photographs and a handmade anniversary greeting for his wife, the collection includes very little of a personal nature.

Organization

The collection is organized into 3 series. They are:

Series I: Professional Papers, 1938-1960 and undated

Series II: Condolences and Memorial Tributes, 1960-1963

Series III: Oversized Materials, circa 1942-1960 and undated

Series Descriptions

Series I: Professional Papers, 1938-1960 and undated

2 boxes

Arrangement: Alphabetical

The Professional Papers series mainly consists of clippings of reviews of Leonard Warren's performances and recordings. With the exception of a collage anniversary greeting created for his wife, the single folder of correspondence contains only a few items relating to bookings and publicity matters. Similarly, there are only four photographs, two of which are snapshots, most likely dating from the 1940s, which show the Warrens relaxing while on tour in Brazil. Also of note are materials relating to Warren's 1958 Soviet Union visit, including scraps of paper containing audience members' requests for particular songs at his recitals.

Series II: Condolences and Memorial Tributes, 1960-1963

2 boxes

Arrangement: Alphabetical

The Condolences and Memorial Tributes series chiefly contains the numerous cards, letters, and telegrams sent to Agatha Leiffen Warren or the Metropolitan Opera Association in the wake of Leonard Warren's untimely death. Senders range from Warren's famous colleagues to ordinary fans; some mailings included essays and poems written in honor of the late singer. Also included is the guest book from the funeral home, which contains many signatures.

Series III: Oversized Materials, circa 1942-1960 and undated

4 boxes

Arrangement: Alphabetical

The Oversized Materials series is comprised of three scrapbooks, which contain additional clippings relating to Warren. Also of interest are several large posters, many of which advertise Warren's appearances in Buenos Aires, Argentina at the Teatro Colón during the 1940s. All of the material in this series is highly fragile.

Box/Folder Description

Series I. Professional Papers, 1938-1960 and undated**Box 1**

- F. 1 Broadsides, 1943-1946 (Teatro Colón performances.)
 Clippings
- F. 2 1938
- F. 3 1940
- F. 4 1941
 1942
- F. 5 Mar.-May
- F. 6 Aug. (South American tour clippings, mainly in Spanish and Portuguese,
 with some typed translations in English.)
- F. 7 Sept.-Dec.
 1943
- F. 8 Mar.- July
- F. 9 May 29-Oct. 3 (South American tour clippings in English, German,
 Hungarian, Spanish, and Portuguese, with some typed translations in
 English.)
- F. 10 Oct. 8-Nov. 26
 1944
- F. 11 Jan.-May
- F. 12 July-Sept. (Mainly South American tour clippings, in Portuguese.)
- F. 13 Oct.-Nov.
 1945
- F. 14 Jan.-May
- F. 15 Aug.-Sept. (South American tour clippings, in Portuguese, with some
 typed translations in English.)
- F. 16 Oct.-Nov.
 1946
- F. 17 Jan.-May
- F. 18 June-Aug. (Mainly South American tour clippings, some in English,
 German, and Spanish.)
- F. 19 Sept.-Dec.
- F. 20 1947

Box 2

- 1948
- F. 1 Jan.-Apr.
- F. 2 May-June (Includes items in Spanish, with some typed translations in
 English.)
- F. 3 Oct.-Nov.
- F. 4 1949 (Includes items in Spanish.)
- 1950
- F. 5 Jan.-May

Box/Folder	Description
F. 6	June-Sept. (South American tour clippings in Spanish and Portuguese.)
F. 7	Oct.-Nov.
F. 8	1951-1954 (Includes items in Italian.)
F. 9	1955-1957 1958
F. 10	Jan.-Apr.
F. 11	May-Sept. (Mainly Soviet Union tour clippings, some in Russian, includes one in Danish, and English translation.)
F. 12	Oct.-Nov.
F. 13	1959-1960
F. 14	Undated (Includes items in Italian.)
F. 15	Correspondence, 1943-1956 and undated (Includes 5 th anniversary message to wife; also some items in Portuguese.)
F. 16	Metropolitan Opera libretto, 1958 (<i>Macbeth</i> .)
F. 17	Photographs, 1947 (Includes print with Warren's autograph and two snapshots from Brazil, probably enclosed with 1945 letter from Ada Giachetti, Teatro Municipal, Rio de Janeiro.)
F. 18	Programs, 1941
F. 19	Scarpia debut, 1955 (Congratulatory telegrams, letters and clippings regarding Warren's performance of the role in <i>Tosca</i> ; includes one letter signed by Rudolf Bing.)
F. 20	Soviet Union tour, 1956-1958 and undated (Clippings, concert requests, correspondence, and programs relating to tour.) Travel ephemera
F. 21	<i>Pocket guide of Rio de Janeiro</i> , circa 1945
F. 22	<i>Kiev</i> , circa 1958 (Picture postcard book inscribed by Karasik, conductor for Warren's performances of <i>Rigoletto</i> .)

Box 3

Series II: Condolences and Memorial Tributes, 1960-1963

F. 1	Abbey Funeral Directors condolence book, 1960
F. 2	Cablegrams, 1960 (Sent to Agatha Warren and Rudolf Bing)
F. 3	Cards, 1960 (Includes commercial sympathy cards, mass cards, cards enclosed with flowers; senders include Lucrezia Bori, Agnes De Mille, Eric Leinsdorf, and Richard Tucker.)
F. 4	Francis Robinson file, 1960 (Letters relating to Leonard Warren originally sent to Metropolitan Opera press office.) Letters, 1960-1963
F. 5	A, 1960 (Includes letter from Kurt Adler.)
F. 6	B, 1960
F. 7	C-D, 1960 (Includes letters from Renato Cellini and Agnes De Mille.)
F. 8	E, 1960
F. 9	F, 1960
F. 10	G, 1960 (Includes letters from Frank Guarrera.)

Box/Folder	Description
F. 11	H-J, 1960 (Includes letter from Jerome Hines.)
F. 12	K, 1960
F. 13	L, 1960 (Includes letter from George London.)
F. 14	M, 1960 (Includes letters from Jean Madeira, George Marek, Giovanni Martinelli, Mr. and Mrs. Lauritz Melchior, Dimitri Mitropoulos, Richard Mohr, and Motley, i.e., Elizabeth Montgomery.)
F. 15	N-O, 1960
F. 16	P, 1960 (Includes letter from Mrs. Ezio Pinza.)
F. 17	R, 1960 (Includes letter from John D. Rockefeller, 3rd.)
Box 4	
F. 1	S, 1960 (Includes letters from Frank St. Leger, Mario Sereni, and Geraldine Souvaine.)
F. 2	T, 1960 (Includes letter from Jennie Tourel.)
F. 3	V-W, 1960
F. 4	Unidentified, 1960 (Includes letters sent to Roy Leiffen.)
F. 5	Metropolitan Opera Guild, 1960-1963 (Correspondence regarding contributions to the Leonard Warren Memorial Fund.)
F. 6	Program for final appearance, 1960 (With ribbon inscribed: "Good-bye...The Family Circle.")
F. 7	<i>Record News</i> , 1960 (Includes <i>A Tribute to Leonard Warren</i> by Helen Hatton, with corrections in ink.) Telegrams, 1960 (Majority sent directly to Agatha Warren, but includes some forwarded by Rudolf Bing and others.)
F. 8	A-B, 1960 (Includes items in Italian.)
F. 9	C-E, 1960 (Includes items in Italian.)
F. 10	F-H, 1960 (Includes items in Italian.)
F. 11	I-L, 1960
F. 12	M-N, 1960
F. 13	P-R, 1960
F. 14	S-T, 1960 (Includes items in French and Italian.)
F. 15	U-W, 1960
F. 16	Unidentified, 1960 (Partial names only; includes probable telegrams from Giorgio Tozzi and Zinka Milanov.)
F. 17	Transcripts, 1960 (Memorial broadcasts by Patrick Hayes and Rudolf Bing; complete text of obituary by John Gutman.)

Series III: Oversized Materials, circa 1942-1960 and undated

Box 5	
F. 1	Newspapers, 1958 (Coverage of Warren's Soviet Union tour.) Posters (All posters are very fragile and should be handled with care.) Teatro Colón productions, circa 1942-1946
F. 2	<i>Un Ballo in Maschera</i> , undated (19, 21, 27 July; 1 Aug., no years given, probably 1946.)
F. 3	Despedida de Leonard Warren, undated (Double bill: <i>El Sombrero de Tres Picos</i> and <i>Pagliacci</i> , 10 Aug., no year given, probably 1943.)

Box/Folder	Description
F. 4	<i>Simon Boccanegra</i> , undated (14 and 30 July, no years given, probably 1942 and 1946 respectively.)
F. 5	Teatro Colón advertisement, undated
F. 6	<i>S. Hurok Presents Leonard Warren</i> , undated
Box 6	Scrapbooks 1948-1949
Box 7	1955-1956
Box 8	1956-1960